[Review of] S. Joshel, Slavery in the Roman World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

Sandra R. Joshel, *Slavery in the Roman World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. xvi, 236. ISBN: 978-0-521-53501-4 (Paperback). $ 24.99. ISBN: 978-0-521-82774-4 (Hardback). $ 85.00.

Sandra R. Joshel's *Slavery in the Roman World* is the latest arrival in the 'Cambridge Introduction to Roman Civilization' series. It is a neat paperback with just over 200 pages of text, plenty of images (73 in total), and a few maps. Following an 'Introduction to Roman slavery' in Chapter 1, the remaining text is divided into four chapters, each devoted to a specific theme (or themes): 'The Roman social order and a history of slavery' (Ch. 2); 'The sale of slaves' (Ch. 3); 'The practices of slaveholders and the lives of slaves' (Ch. 4); 'Slaves at work: in the fields, the household, and the marketplace' (Ch. 5). As the chapter headings indicate, the book lacks a clear analytical framework: instead, the reader is presented with a mélange of topics seemingly chosen at random. To be sure, the rationale behind the chapters is explained at the end of the Introduction: '(e)ach of the following chapters weaves together literature, law, inscriptions, and material culture to look at the intersection of slavery as a Roman social institution and slavery as an experience [...]' (27). But given, as the author states on occasion elsewhere, that we have very little evidence from those who actually 'experienced' slavery, it is quite unclear how the evidence for our knowledge on slavery as a Roman social institution can be separated from the evidence used to comprehend the Roman slave system as 'an experience': our understanding of the former is derived from the very sources that are employed to come to terms with the latter. As a result, aspects pertaining to slavery as an institution are regularly introduced in the form of a synthesis which does not allow the student to understand the overlaps in the source material employed to construct 'both sides' of the story. The problem is increased through a confused presentation of the evidence for Roman slavery. In the Introduction (13), the reader is informed that '(h)istorians look at four kinds of sources to understand Roman slavery: literature, law, inscriptions, and archaeological remains.' The list is evidently uneven, comparing apples with oranges, since law is a social institution rather than a type of evidence, and literature only one kind of textual evidence; nor is there any indication of the rich and varied overlaps between the different source bodies (e.g. between 'text' and 'object'/'physical context' in the case of inscriptions), and their potential for the study of the peculiar institution. Instead, the reader is finally informed that physical remains inform about physical life: '(t)he study of ancient objects, art, and ruins contributes to our understanding of the physical life of slaves [...]' (17). Given the remit of the series—to be of use to students who have no prior knowledge of or familiarity with Roman antiquity—one would have hoped for greater clarity in the presentation of what are core issues for the doing of ancient history.

The four chapters then present the reader with a smooth mélange, rather than a window onto the complexity of 'the story'. In Chapter 2, for instance, one is offered a schematic representation of the Roman social order—specifically set to encompass '[...] not only legal status but also social standing [...]'—that puts slaves *tout court* at the

bottom of society, 'topped' by freed slave citizens (!), freeborn Roman citizens, municipal magistrates and senators, equestrians, senators, and, finally, nobles (Table 11, p. 31): leaving aside that not all freed slaves gained citizenship upon manumission even if freed by a Roman citizen (a matter that is wrongly put on p. 42), there is little chance for the student to come to terms with the powers and related social statuses held by slaves such as the *insularius* Eros, who by all appearances collected rents from free people for his master, the wealthy T. Statilius Taurus, in Rome (*CIL* VI 6299); or by craftsmen, such as Celer, the slave of Q. Granius Verus, who ran a bakery in Herculaneum (*CIL* X 8058); or by managerial slaves in charge of a productive estate, such as Veneria, the *vilica* of Attia Galla, and her partner the *vilicus* Felix, from the area around Corfinio (*AE* 1997, 455); etc.: as a result, the slave (and ex-slave) epitaphs discussed in Chapter 4 (129–31 and 141–9) to document the lives of and relationships between slaves (and ex-slaves) are effectively treated in isolation from the points made about the Roman social order in Chapter 2—despite the admission that slaves like Musicus Scurranus '[...] led lives more comfortable than poor freeborn Romans' (pp. 130–1); and the same holds true for the brief digression on the burials of the (free) poor at Isola Sacra (15–6 with Figs. 4–5). Similarly, the student is given little background to the 'reading' of the material evidence presented here: anyone attaching a particularly 'slavish' interpretation to the material evidence for kitchens in Pompeii—'[slave cooks] spent (or must be imagined to have spent) hours in small rooms, dirtied by smoke and the odors of cooked food, refuse, and the nearby latrine and crowded with assistants and waiters carrying dishes in and out' (25)—is well advised to pay a visit to French brasseries and bistrots today, not least in the (food) capital Paris, to understand better how small small can be, and how cramped, smoky and greasy a cherished chef's work area often is, not to speak of its proximity to the latrine—and this in a country where an appreciation of food and chefs (cf. the derogatory rendering 'the likes of Zena [the cook]' on p. 23 and the insistence on the term 'cook' throughout pp. 17–26) is *de rigeur*.

The tendency to gloss over complex issues also holds true for the discussion of source material that spans the typological divides of evidence: thus, we are not told why we should think that the workers shown in the reliefs on the so-called Tomb of the Baker were slaves (197–201, with Fig. 61); or why we should think M. Vergilius Eurysaces (who is commemorated by it and whose name is known from his funerary epitaph) an ex-slave—a matter not stated, but clearly implied 199–202, with Fig. 62). But there is a further issue with the use of the material evidence: time and again, a piece of evidence is given in support of a statement that it cannot possibly support (by itself). Thus, in support of the assertion that '(m)anumission [...] was a common practice in Roman society [...]' (41), Figure 15 is offered: the relief of four freed slaves from Rome from the Augustan period; what is not on offer is an explanation as to how this particular piece of evidence documents that manumission was common—and the ensuing admission that there is ongoing scholarly debate on the matter does little to render intelligent the use of evidence here practiced.

There are other issues that will lead the reader unfamiliar with Roman history astray above and beyond matters pertaining directly to the study of slavery—all of which are linked to the development of the Roman empire: the acquisition of Latin is related to 'Italian birth' (108)—a statement that could not be more wrong for much of ancient Italy prior to the Social War and for even larger areas of the Roman Empire; or the wearing of the toga (solely) to Roman citizenship (132)—when there is no reason to think that Junian Latins (who after all bore the *tria nomina*: Pliny, *Ep*. 10.104) did not wear the precious garment if so desired (and Latins and coloniary Latins before the Social War). Why should the novice not be exposed to a more complex picture of social grouping and state formation? After all, that same novice grows up in a world where the ability to refrain from a rushed identification of 'insider'/'outsider'-status on the basis of attire or language, not to mention birth place or other indicators of 'origin', is decisive for the future of civil society. (Roman slaves, one may hasten to add, can also be found depicted in the toga, complicating the matter further—such as Papi(as), known to be a slave because of the inscription that accompanies his representation in a toga: *CIL* VI, 2365; and it is furthermore not clear what the student is to make of the contention that '(o)nly in formal attire did poor citizens stand out from slaves [...]', supported by a picture of a funerary relief of a (not so poor) couple in toga and stola respectively (Figure 37), having just been told two sentences earlier (all on p. 132) that '(i)t seems that slaves were distinguished from citizens by the quality of their clothes, not the type'.) These methodological and historical examples tie in more generally with the static picture of Roman slavery on offer that does not take account of historical changes, except for the sub-chapter devoted to the 'History of slavery' (Ch. 2, 48–75)—seven pages of which (i.e. a quarter) are given over to an account of events traditionally understood as slave rebellions that took up in total less than a decade of 1000 years of Roman slavery: the result of the rich literary evidence for these events—but why should the patterns produced by the evidence determine the modern narrative?

If one were to judge this book by its cover—a detail of a painting from Pompeii showing fullers at work (discussed on pp. 201–6)—uncertainty would prevail as to *how* we may construct the story of slavery at Rome and the roles played by slaves in Roman society: there is no reason to think, *a priori*, that any of the workers shown are slaves (or, *vice versa*, that they are free); and anyone wishing to employ this and other evidence towards a better understanding of Roman slavery and society must 'qualify' the evidence, i.e. s/he must show through argumentation why a specific piece of evidence matters for the study of slavery, and what exactly for—be it visual representations of craftsmen, the material remains for kitchens, the tombstones of slaves and ex-slaves, or the Byzantine excerpts of Diodorus' slave war narrative. It is only through digestion of such (much more complicated) arguments that include a 'qualification' of the evidence that the uninitiated is empowered with the skills needed to progress in the study of the peculiar institution, and of the ancient world as a whole.

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